

Abstract: Case Study on Assessing Bird Injury from Freshwater Oil Spills

This paper provides an overview of efforts to assess injury to migratory birds from a smaller oil spill (approximately 2100 gallons of number 2 fuel oil) on the Mississippi River in 1999. The assessment was conducted as part of a natural resource damages claim under the Oil Pollution Act. This case illustrates the steps involved to compile species-specific life history data, define on-site injury to migratory birds, and calculate damages using newer Resource Equivalency Analysis (REA) economic techniques. The bulk of the time was spent on searching the literature for species-specific life history data (e.g., fledgling mortality rate, adult survival rate, nest territory size). The case team suspects that these type of data needs and resulting literature searches are played out over and over again, across the country, with differing interpretations/results. This case offers lessons on how the data fit into a natural resources damage assessment, highlighting the need for an aquatic bird species life history database that all practitioners could use for spills assessment. Additional suggestions include documenting environmental circumstances during a spill which may help or hinder recovery of dead birds, allowing for better defense of the selected multiplier, and learning from the vets as they treat and release birds as to the likelihood that they will survive given the bird's health, injuries, and weather conditions. An understanding of these methods may enable practitioners to better assess the environmental impacts to other species and habitats.

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